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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: VATICAN: BISHOPS MUST BE MORE INVOLVED IN SUDAN

REF: A. 03 VATICAN 5669

[1](#)B. VATICAN 239

Summary

[1](#)1. (SBU) In a meeting requested by the Holy See, Vatican Foreign Minister Giovanni Lajolo told the Ambassador the Sudanese Catholic bishops were in a position to play an important role in the North-South peace process. In fact, according to Lajolo, their participation in reconciliation efforts and the reform of the constitutional and legal system is crucial to the possibility of long-term success. Lajolo expressed the Holy See's concern for the humanitarian crisis in Darfur and the Church's desire to facilitate internally displaced person (IDP) and refugee returns there and elsewhere in Sudan. The Holy See hopes that a nudge from the USG might prompt greater GOS openness to participation by the Sudanese bishops in all these endeavors. End Summary.

Bishops Could be Crucial in North-South Peace Process

[1](#)2. (SBU) In previous reporting on the Holy See and Sudan, Post has noted the Vatican's desire that the Sudanese Catholic bishops be involved in interreligious dialogue -- and its belief that they are in a position to play a constructive role (refuels). In a February 17 meeting with the Ambassador, Holy See Foreign Minister Giovanni Lajolo again emphasized the potential usefulness of the Catholic Church on the issue, noting that the Church could contribute to a "reconciliation of the factions in the South." Lajolo added a sense of urgency to the subject we had not heard previously, underscored by the fact that he requested the meeting with the Ambassador specifically to speak about Sudan. He said the GOS was not consulting adequately with the Sudanese bishops, who had been left out of the loop on many issues. In particular, Lajolo said, the bishops should be involved in the reform of Sudan's constitution and legal system. In this, and other issues, a non-paper Lajolo passed (complete text passed to EUR/WE) noted that "the Church must be involved in the preparatory stages (of reform planning)." Further, "special attention should be given to the question of the juridical definition of the Church, which cannot be understood as a NGO." According to Lajolo, these subjects could have a significant impact on religious freedom issues.

Holy See Concerned About Darfur

[1](#)3. (SBU) Lajolo emphasized the Holy See's concern about the situation in Darfur, noting the humanitarian cost of the conflict. Lajolo noted that there were few Christians in the region, but said that factor did not diminish the Holy See's attention to the human suffering in the area. The non-paper stated that "humanitarian corridors" were no longer sufficient to ease human suffering in Darfur, and that "the parties, especially the Government of Khartoum, should be persuaded to undertake peace initiatives."

Church Anxious to be Involved; Hopes for USG Nudge

[1](#)4. (SBU) Ambassador noted the USG's commitment to peace in Sudan and our agreement that the Darfur situation was serious both from a humanitarian point of view and because of the threat it posed to progress in the North-South peace process. Lajolo told the Ambassador that while the Church's efforts on behalf of peace and reconciliation would be most effective in the North-South dispute rather than in Darfur, the Holy See wanted to contribute to reconciliation in any way it could. His memorandum noted that the Church "especially desires to assist in the return of (IDPs and) refugees." With the Holy See having already impressed upon the Sudanese bishops and the GOS the importance of cooperation and

dialogue (reftels), the Vatican's contact with Post at the ambassadorial level signals the Holy See's seriousness on the issue, and its belief that a nudge from the USG might prompt the GOS to be more open to participation by the Sudanese bishops in these various endeavors.

Nicholson

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